

ANGLING IN GREAT BRITAIN

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Angling in Great Britain by William Senior

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WILLIAM SENIOR

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GREAT BRITAIN**

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International Fisheries Exhibition

LONDON, 1883

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ANGLING

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IN

GREAT BRITAIN

BY

WILLIAM SENIOR

("RED SPINNER")

AUTHOR OF "WATERSIDE SKETCHES"; "BY STREAM AND SEA";
"TRAVEL AND TROUT IN THE ANTIPODES," &c.

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ANGLING IN GREAT BRITAIN.

CHAPTER I.

A GENERAL SURVEY.

THE opening sentence of this Handbook I should like to be the expression of a belief—to wit that, take it all in all, year in and year out, there is no better sport in the world for the angler than in Great Britain. The affected sighing after the good old times, and the gloomy apprehension that this highly favoured country is going to the dogs, with which we are all but too familiar, are shared in by him, of course, if he would live up to his privileges; nevertheless, grumbling granted, and too much cause for grumbling granted in the same breath, he has not a great deal to complain of.

At a very interesting meeting last year at the Society of Arts, when a goodly congregation of anglers met to hear and discuss a paper by Mr. Marston on the propagation of coarse fish, we were all highly amused at a speech from an eminent American pisciculturist, who dilated upon the excellent qualities of the Black Bass, and suggested the propriety of introducing that sportive fish into certain British waters. He incidentally referred to some of the angling paragraphs which appear week after week in the English sporting papers, and raised an easy laugh by dwelling upon the fuss sometimes made over infinitesimal

catches of fish. Doubtless, there is an element of absurdity in the published reports of an angling contest carried out upon solemnly promulgated rules, and with all the formality of supervision and directions from a responsible committee, yet which results in the gentleman who bears away the most valuable prize winning by an interesting roachlet seven inches long, and a small eel* to make the weight more imposing. Every week, as a matter of fact, if any one cared to search for them, a dozen reports of angling might be selected to support the one-sided view that in this ancient land we are, in the matter of sport, reduced to a very sorry plight.

Since that meeting was held, I have, however, employed myself in carefully noting the corresponding literature of the United States, and I find that the angling records there, where everything is so splendidly new and gloriously big, do not materially differ from our own. Time after time have American sportsmen assured me that the piteous cry, in lamentation for rivers overfished and sport destroyed, is familiar under the Stars and Stripes, and that the American angler has continually to push out to fresh fishing grounds. In New Zealand and Tasmania, where the best trout-fishing in the world will probably be found within a few years, that plaintive wail would also be echoed but for the obvious sparsity of population, and it will be heard when there are more fishermen to worry the fish.

In the angling waters of Great Britain we may at any rate fairly assume that we know the worst. With us, there is no pushing out west until we reach the Rocky Mountain trout. Our sport is confined within a comparatively tiny

* I believe in most angling clubs eels are not recognised as weighable game. But I saw a match won in the manner described.

ring fence of island surf. It is not possible for any angler to explore and discover a new river. But let us be thankful, if we know the worst we also know the best. We know that, by careful conservation, by spread of knowledge upon matters connected with fishes and their food, and by the possibilities of applying to their homes some of the sanitary principles which we are beginning to find out ought not to be neglected by human kind, angling in Great Britain has vastly improved, and may in the future be improved to an almost indefinite extent. There are, no doubt, streams once renowned for their sport, that have been as nearly overfished as any streams can be, and there would be room for despair but for the certainty that the evil can and will be remedied.

If a tenth portion, or a twentieth, of the sound advice given in the Papers and discussions of the International Fisheries Exhibition Conferences, and in the Handbooks published during the summer, were carried out with regard to our lakes and rivers, there would be no necessity to indulge in the unwholesome luxury of sighing after the sleepy old days of our grandmothers. And, in time, theory will have fruition in practice; rivers that are to-day polluted will sparkle clear; trout that are starved, ugly, and unhappy from causes well known *not* to be beyond control, will be as merry as the denizens of the Tennysonian brook; depleted streams will be once more dimpled with rises; and the 'prentice boys may again have the opportunity of protesting against too much salmon, and have that protective clause (purely imaginary, there is every reason to believe), of which so much has been written, inserted in their indentures.

In confirmation of the humble belief which is expressed at the beginning of this chapter, let me proceed to the